UNITED
NATIONS

A

General Assembly

Distr.
GENERAL

A/AC.96/SR.488
14 October 1993

Original: ENGLISH

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE OF THE PROGRAMME OF THE UNITED NATIONS
HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR REFUGEES

Forty-fourth session

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 488th MEETING

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva,
on Friday, 8 October 1993, at 10 a.m.

Chairman: Mr. BODDENS-HOSANG (Netherlands)

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GE.93-02822 (E)

The meeting was called to order at 10.25 a.m.

REVIEW OF UNHCR PROGRAMMES FINANCED BY VOLUNTARY FUNDS IN 1992-1993; ADOPTION OF THE 1994 GENERAL PROGRAMMES AND BUDGET (continued) (agenda item 5 (a)) (A/AC.96/808, Parts I to VI)

1. Mr. SAFAEE (Islamic Republic of Iran) said that his delegation objected to the content of paragraph 5.0.20 in Part V of document A/AC.96/808. His Government's policy was the voluntary, dignified and safe repatriation of Afghan refugees. Despite difficult economic constraints, the Islamic Republic of Iran continued to support, encourage and facilitate the voluntary repatriation of Afghan refugees to their homeland and to care for the large number of refugees remaining in its territory.

PARTICIPATION OF GOVERNMENT OBSERVER DELEGATIONS (agenda item 6) (A/AC.96/XLIV/CRP.2/Rev.1)

2. The CHAIRMAN recalled that, in accordance with a decision taken by the Executive Committee in 1988, meetings of the Sub-Committees and informal meetings of the Executive Committee had been opened to participation by Government delegations which submitted formal applications for approval by the plenary. A list of observer Governments which had submitted applications for 1994 was contained in document A/AC.96/XLIV/CRP.2/Rev.1. If he heard no objection, he would take it that the Executive Committee approved those applications.

3. It was so decided.

CONSIDERATION OF THE PROVISIONAL AGENDA OF THE FORTY-FIFTH SESSION OF THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE (agenda item 7) (A/AC.96/XLIV/CRP.1)

4. The CHAIRMAN said that, if he heard no objection, he would take it that the Executive Committee decided to adopt the provisional agenda for its forty-fifth session (A/AC.96/XLIV/CRP.1).

5. The provisional agenda (A/AC.96/XLIV/CRP.1) was adopted.

ANY OTHER BUSINESS (agenda item 8)

6. Mr. KAMAL (Pakistan), said that, in the light of the High Commissioner's opening statement and of several statements made by delegations during the general debate, he had three ideas to put forward for the Executive Committee's consideration.

7. First, in the context of the diplomacy of prevention and containment, there was a pressing need to identify geographical areas of potential and future instability and tension where significant displacements of populations could occur. For each of those areas, the root causes of tensions should be identified, along with options for possible responses, so that timely and effective choices could be made and action taken before the situations had generated into actual crises requiring emergency intervention.

8. Secondly, the fact that, in many parts of the world, the problems of refugees, economic migrants and internally and externally displaced persons were today inextricably linked created a new challenge which called for an adjustment of the international community's traditional thinking and responses. The Executive Committee needed to reflect on how that adjustment could be made.

9. Thirdly, the new global situation had also created a need for greater clarity in defining the mandates and responsibilities of existing institutions and mechanisms. Some thought had already been given to that problem, but much more was called for. The Executive Committee needed to build on and further strengthen expertise in the general area of displaced and uprooted populations. To some extent, that required the harmonization of international and national rules relating to international humanitarian law, the law relating to victims of war and the law relating to refugees, migrants and displaced persons. Such harmonization must, of course, be done without harming existing institutions and structures. The strengthening of expertise also required the development of a modus vivendi based on existing practices, but geared to preventive rather than curative action. A high degree of coordination between different components of the international system would be essential for that purpose; there again, however, reflection must precede action.

10. Initially, the issues he had outlined could probably be discussed, on the basis of existing resources, by a small advisory think tank constituted with the best available expertise drawn from member States and from within and outside the High Commissioner's Office. The idea might perhaps be discussed further, bearing in mind, of course, that the work of any think tank would have to be conducted with the full degree of transparency that all delegations had come to admire in and expect from the present leadership of UNHCR.

11. The CHAIRMAN said that the suggestions just made would be considered by the Bureau and referred to the Executive Committee at the appropriate time.

ADOPTION OF THE DRAFT REPORT OF THE FORTY-FOURTH SESSION (agenda item 9) (A/AC.96/XLIV/CRP.3)

12. Mr. MIRANDA (Nicaragua), Rapporteur, introducing the draft report of the forty-fifth session of the Executive Committee contained in document A/AC.96/XLIV/CRP.3, said that the text of the following decision should be added at the end of chapter III:

"J. Decision on Internally Displaced Persons

30. The Executive Committee,

Considering the provisions of the General Conclusion on International Protection adopted by the forty-fourth session of the Executive Committee regarding internally displaced persons, notably its paragraphs (s) and (ff),

(a) Requests the Sub-Committee on Administrative and Financial Matters to review the financial and programmatic implications of the current UNHCR activities, including information, related to internally displaced persons."

13. In addition, the last three lines of paragraph (n) of the General Conclusion on International Protection (chap. III.A.1., para. 19) should be amended to read:

"... and to keep the Sub-Committee of the Whole on International Protection and, where appropriate, the Sub-Committee on Administrative and Financial Matters informed;".

14. Mr. LEBEDEV (Observer for the Russian Federation), referring to paragraph (n) of the General Conclusion on International Protection, stressed that there was an urgent need for consultations, as provided for in the paragraph, on refugee problems in Russia. As his delegation had pointed out in its earlier statements, any delay in holding consultations could entail unpredictable consequences. He urged the High Commissioner to take the necessary steps to begin such consultations.

15. The draft report of the forty-fourth session (A/AC.96/XLIV/CRP.3), as amended, was adopted.

CLOSURE OF THE SESSION (agenda item 10)

16. Mrs. OGATA (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) said that she had listened with great interest to the views of all members and had been very much encouraged by their positive statements. The fact that some 80 delegations had taken the floor was in itself a clear indication of the level of their interest in and support for the work of her Office. She thanked them for their valuable contributions, as well as for the kind words addressed to her and her Office; they represented a tribute to the dedication and diligence of UNHCR staff in the field and at Headquarters. It had been a pleasure and a privilege for her to meet many of the staff during her frequent field visits. She greatly valued their support and cooperation in confronting the challenges which lay ahead in a turbulent world. As she had noted in her opening statement, there were many issues of concern to staff which required urgent attention. She reaffirmed her full commitment to pursuing those issues in the coming months.

17. The past year had been a difficult and demanding one, confronting UNHCR with the dual challenge of responding to emergencies, while, at the same time, seizing opportunities for solutions, often in the midst of instability and uncertainty. The strategy of prevention, preparedness and solutions had been widely and strongly endorsed. Everyone was aware, however, of the parameters of prevention, the limits of preparedness and the constraints of solutions. The task ahead was difficult enough with support, cooperation and resources: without them, it was impossible. She therefore deeply appreciated all

expressions of political support and was grateful for the generous contributions announced by a number of Governments. The pledges totalled US$ 86.8 million, of which some US$ 30 million were for General Programmes. Her Office would inform the members of the Executive Committee of the funding situation before the Pledging Conference on 10 November 1993.

18. She had listened carefully to members' comments on the problem of the internally displaced and had taken note of the support expressed for UNHCR's activities on behalf of that group, as well as of the warning about the need to place careful limits on UNHCR's involvement. She was gratified that many delegations had found the suggested criteria for the involvement of her Office to be a useful and pragmatic means of clarifying and delimiting responsibilities for that complex yet urgent humanitarian problem.

19. The Executive Committee's encouragement and guidance were particularly important at a time when UNHCR's humanitarian work was increasingly becoming a critical part of a larger agenda for peace, security and development in the post-cold war world. The statements of many delegations had reflected the importance of the linkage between peace-keeping, peacemaking and peacebuilding, on the one hand, and humanitarian assistance, on the other. Those linkages underscored the need for closer partnership with other actors. She counted on all members of the Executive Committee to use their influence in the various forums in which they participated to emphasize and mobilize the pentagonal partnership she had outlined in her opening statement.

20. The partnership-building exercise implied a need to create greater awareness of refugee issues among policy-makers. As one of the means of achieving that goal, the first Report on the State of the World's Refugees would be published by UNHCR in early November. The English version was due out on 9 November, the French version in early December and other language versions would follow in early 1994. She hoped that members would find the report informative and thought-provoking. The plan was that similar reports should be issued every two years.

21. The current session of the Executive Committee was coming to an end, but UNHCR's work had to go on. Looking ahead, she was aware of uncertainties, perils and threats, but was also encouraged by new forces of change, symbolized most recently and dramatically by the remarkable signs of peace in the Middle East. Ultimately, it was through the promotion of peace that solutions to refugee problems could be found, as it was through the pursuit of global human security that refugee problems could be prevented. It was gratifying and reassuring to know that UNHCR enjoyed the support and cooperation of the member and observer States of the Executive Committee, the United Nations agencies and international and non-governmental organizations as it continued its unique and challenging mission of protection and solutions for refugees.

22. The CHAIRMAN noted with pleasure that, thanks to the spirit of cooperation shown by all concerned, the Executive Committee had been able to complete its work on time. The session was coming to an end, but work would continue to be done both in Geneva and in the field. He hoped that UNHCR staff in the field would receive some new inspiration from the debates which

had taken place and, even more important, that the refugees themselves would be heartened by the knowledge that work was being done on their behalf.

23. The decisions just adopted would add further duties to the already considerable workloads of the two Sub-Committees. Non-governmental organizations could also draw fresh inspiration from the session, which had shown very clearly that all delegations supported the Partnership in Action (PARINAC) process leading up to the world conference to be held in Oslo in June 1994.

24. He declared the forty-fourth session of the Executive Committee closed.

The meeting rose at 11.05 a.m.